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FOR CBS NEWS

PROGRAM The Urban Report

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FULL TEXT

ANNOUNCER: From Oakland Community College, this is the Urban Report.

(MUSIC)

ANNOUNCER: The Urban Report, a review of news and public affairs, of ideas, the creative arts and the human condition from the vantage point of those who live, work and govern in the urban region--as reported by Eric Thuma.

ERIC THUMA: This is Eric Thuma, speaking for Oakland Community College and The Urban Report.

Late this year CBS News produced a documentary entitled "The Guns of Autumn"--an examination of hunting in America. Even before the ninety minute program, produced by Irv Drasnin of CBS News was broadcast, the network began to get reaction to it from hunting and conservation groups around the country.

The program was aired in late August and with the exception of the Block Drug Company and CBS programming commercials, "The Guns of Autumn" was unsponsored, due to pressure exerted on sponsors by the National Rifle Association, according to some reports in the industry.

Sensing an undercurrent of adverse opinion on the broadcast, CBS took the unusual step of scheduling a reaction to it in September, entitled "Echoes of the Guns of Autumn".

One month later, the Michigan United Conservation Clubs announced that it intended to sue CBS for three hundred million dollars in a slander and libel suit, slated to go into initial hearing tomorrow in Ingham County Circuit Court.

Recently we spoke by telephone with George Hoover, the

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Director of Information Services for CBS News about the broadcast in which he outlined CBS's position on the program.

GEORGE HOOVER: On the morning that we found out about the suit, what we--our initial reaction was that mirrors don't slander anyone. Okay.

THUMA: I know, Mr. Hoover, that you can't talk specifically about the suit itself since it is a process that is going into litigation. Let me then talk to you about the program "The Guns of Autumn". Exactly how does CBS feel about the program?

HOOVER: We're very proud of it.

THUMA: Do you think that it was fair?

HOOVER: Yes, sir.

THUMA: Some of the criticisms that were leveled at the program concerned themselves with the betrayal of hunting. And I think one of the logical questions to ask you: What do you think the intent of the producer was?

HOOVER: The producer, I'm assuming, when you say that, that you feel that he had an intent when he set out, set out to do this broadcast. He did not have an intent.

THUMA: All right.

HOOVER: The producer had no feelings about hunting either way. He was given an assignment. It was an assignment that he didn't particularly care to do.

THUMA: Mm hm.

HOOVER: Because he had no, he had no knowledge of the subject frankly. But he--

THUMA: What was the nature of the assignment?

HOOVER: To go out and do a broadcast about hunting--hunting in America.

THUMA: Okay.

HOOVER: And so he got into it. And ninety-five, ninety-nine percent of the research material and the resource material that went into this broadcast came from hunters and came from hunting organizations.

THUMA: Did they--

HOOVER: He went out, he filmed, every place we went,

went to and filmed, was recommended to us--either by a hunting organization or by a state conservation group or state conservation officials as being typical. We were not going--his intent was not, I mean, once he got into it, his intent was not to go out and find the aberrations or the slob hunters.

THUMA: Mm hm.

HOOVER: And every place was recommended to us by hunters, who said: That's a place to go. You want the typical hunt. That's where you go. And that's what we went out to do.

THUMA: So on that basis, you feel as though you presented an accurate portrayal of the typical American hunter.

HOOVER: That's what we found. And that's what we found after being recommended--or after recommendations were made to us by hunters themselves or people concerned with hunting and with game management and game conservation.

THUMA: Now, insofar as the program itself was concerned, even before it went on the air, it attracted a good deal of controversy and I remember reading that one spokesman for a hunting organization felt as though, if the program was accurate, hunters would get a bad image anyway.

HOOVER: That's correct.

THUMA: Do you remember that quotation?

HOOVER: I do.

THUMA: In a--

HOOVER: The exact quote was--I forget who it was who talked to the producer. And he, whoever it was, said, well, is this an anti-hunting show? And the producer said, no, we didn't, we weren't, we're not trying to do an anti-hunting show; we're trying to do an objective show. And the man's response was: if it's objective, it's anti-hunting.

THUMA: Okay.

And with that in mind, in a sense, I suppose, what we are really getting into is the matter of how the producers of the program perceived their journalistic responsibility. And I think that the comment that you started the interview with about mirrors don't hurt anybody is essentially true on almost any news subject. People are going to look at a program and they are going to do so through their own biases and prejudices. Is that--

HOOVER: Right. Their own perceptions. That's correct.

THUMA: And so, if--

HOOVER: The quote was not: Mirrors don't hurt any--it's: Mirrors don't slander anyone.

THUMA: Okay. So what you were doing is taking the cameras out, showing hunting as you understood it to be.

HOOVER: As we saw it. As we found it. As it--and, again, I want to stress this, that it's places that were recommended to us by people close to hunting.

THUMA: The program that followed "The Guns of Autumn". "Echoes of--"

HOOVER: "Echoes". Right.

THUMA: Were you concerned after the initial program was aired about the issues of fairness and how did the fairness doctrine play a role in--

HOOVER: The fairness doctrine had nothing to do with the "Echoes".

THUMA: It did not.

HOOVER: It had nothing to do with "Echoes". The, before "Guns" aired, there was already, we could feel, we were getting this, we were getting reactions and pressures from, from hunting people and from, from, from gun people saying, don't put it on. We knew, we had letters, saying, we're going to, we're going to, we're going to write to the sponsors or we're going to, we're going to boycott CBS. We could see that there was a firestorm starting. And one of the things that television doesn't, hasn't done very often is to examine its own effect on, on the society. And we saw that something was going to happen here, that was going to be unique; and so, before "Guns" was aired, we decided that we would do a broadcast about the effect of "Guns". And we announced it.

Now, if the "Guns" would have come on and just died, then there would have been nothing. I'm sure we would have just canceled that idea. But we announced it ahead of "Guns" because we felt that it was a good opportunity to see and to study, when you, when you get such emotional issue as this--what happens and how do people react. And that's why, that's why "Echoes" was created.

THUMA: Would you, perhaps, do that with any issue that you felt as though might generate a controversy?

HOOVER: I don't, I don't know. As far as I know, the only time that CBS did something like this before, I mean,

previously was on "The Son Of The Pentagon".

THUMA: Mm hm.

HOOVER: We did a number of studies, I mean, you can't go and study the effect of every documentary but knowing that this was a subject that is so, I mean, the raw feelings on both sides of the issue, we just felt that it was something that we could, we could study and we could, we could report on.

THUMA: I think one of the more interesting developments about "Guns of Autumn" was the fact that before the broadcast went on the air, all but one of the sponsors pulled out. Could you talk to me a few minutes about that? Is that unusual?

HOOVER: Yes.

THUMA: It seemed to me that there were some groups that were obviously putting pressures on sponsors to, in effect, economically bludgeon them into not carrying a controversial show. Did the National Rifle Association work at all in that activity?

HOOVER: That's what's been reported in the press. And I believe that the man at the NRA, I forget the name, is Tom Hodges, but I'm not, I'm not a hundred percent sure--I have to look it up--has said, yes, he did make calls. He said he was not pressuring, pressuring them, as I recall, it's okay--

THUMA: Right.

HOOVER: That he was not pressuring them. He was just informing them.

THUMA: Which, in the real word, is basically a form of pressure.

HOOVER: Those are your words, sir.

THUMA: Yes. Okay. I--

HOOVER: When we get into advertising matters, I work at CBS News. I don't work for CBS.

THUMA: Right.

HOOVER: When we get into advertising matters and sponsorship matters, CBS News has nothing to do with that.

THUMA: Okay.

HOOVER: We don't sell time. We don't see the money.

That all goes to the company and the company handles that.

THUMA: Mm hm.

HOOVER: We are in--we are independent. They tell us, they tell us when we can put on our documentaries and we go out and make the documentaries that we want and they never see them and the advertisers don't see them and--until they're close-circuited or put on the air.

THUMA: A final question about this subject. From what I understand, the group here in Michigan that's suing CBS is going to approach it on the issue of free speech and journalistic integrity. Do you feel, sir, that the basic tenets of good journalism were followed in "The Guns of Autumn"?

HOOVER: I certainly do. The man who produced this broadcast is one of, I, I, I believe this personally--one of broadcasting's finest journalists. I don't know if you remember a broadcast called "You And The Commercial", which was a very controversial broadcast here. And it was about advertising on television. He produced that and it was just a superb, objective journalistic job, that, that not a lot of people were happy about, including some people in this company. I mean he's just a sound, professional objective journalist.

THUMA: The Director of Information Services for CBS News, George Hoover.

In the effort to examine the issues involved in the pending suit against CBS about "The Guns of Autumn", I spoke to Thomas L. Washington, the Executive Director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs. Here now is that pre-recorded interview.

Mr. Washington, you have heard Mr. Hoover's comments about "The Guns of Autumn" and how he feels about CBS News' practices in that program. Why is the Michigan Conservation Clubs suing CBS, first of all?

THOMAS L. WASHINGTON: Well, I think that there, there are really several reasons. The first one that comes to mind is that CBS has, in our judgment, made an attempt to maliciously malign and slander an entire class of people. Our suit happens to pertain to a class in Michigan. But really, the class is nationwide and numbers some twenty million. We think that it's an overt attempt on the part of CBS to join ranks with some factions of the anti-hunting fraternity to ultimately stop hunting, very frankly.

THUMA: So you believe that, in effect, the CBS piece was a concerted propaganda effort, in effect.

WASHINGTON: Well--

THUMA: --With a deliberate point of view...

WASHINGTON: Yah. I think that--

THUMA: ...hunting.

WASHINGTON: I think that they did conspire in advance to portray hunters as inconsiderate, as lustful, as bloodthirsty slobs, just in a poor light. And I think that in our complaint, we have charged that.

THUMA: Now, early on in the interview, which you've just heard where Mr. Hoover said that one hunter was quoted as saying that any program about hunting could really not be presented objectively. Obviously, your group feels that the CBS programs were not objective. By what criteria do you mean that they were not objective?

WASHINGTON: Well, when CBS first contacted us, they expressed a desire to produce a film that would show hunting and the American hunter as it exists in the United States today. We don't deny that they did show a part of hunting as it exists today, a part, which frankly we deplore--or certain parts of that film we deplore--some of the parts they took out of context and they twisted around and distorted in such a manner as to make them appear deplorable, when actually, on the scene they weren't.

THUMA: Can you give me an example?

WASHINGTON: Well, for instance, the very opening scene. They opened the film with a bear being shot out of a tree. They switched to a garbage dump. They switched--in which they showed bears being shot at a garbage dump, which most sportsmen deplore and then switched to a very legitimate and first class bear hunting camp run by Doug Hummert(?) in the Upper Peninsula and back to the bear being shot out of the tree.

Now, this was so cleverly done, that it even fooled some topflight journalists. I noticed one article in Outdoor Life Magazine, in which the editor of that article, or the writer appears to have confused the two different scenes, which were miles apart as being one and the same hunt. That's an example.

They also played music that gave the Hummert bear camp a carnival type atmosphere. That doesn't exist there. They even stated on the, in the film that the camp was awakened to this kind of carnival music and that's not true. That music is not played there. It didn't exist there. That was added

by CBS. This is an example.

THUMA: Now, do you think that if the producer had not made that editorial judgment about what pieces of film to use in that particular way, the program would have been objective? Is it the editing of it that you find objectionable?

WASHINGTON: No. I, I think if they'd really wanted to be objective, well, first of all, let me say this, that if hunting itself is not a very good spectator sport, okay, and in order to present an objective film on hunting, one would have to go into, I think, all sides of the issue: why people hunt, what hunters have done, how they perpetuate their sport, what assistance they've provided other forms of wild life, what they get out the hunting experience, aside from the actual taking of the game that they happen to be pursuing. Now, CBS did none of these. They, we tried to get them to go into some different kinds of hunting experiences and they, and they turned us down and perhaps that should have raised our suspicions but they were very clever and they seemed very sincere in their intentions and, as we now know, they weren't sincere at all.

THUMA: It seems to me in the sequel program "Echoes of the Guns of Autumn", there were sequences from hunting films shown produced by hunting organizations, were there not?

WASHINGTON: There were some sequences in that second film, which were from the film, "A Question of Hunting" produced by Remington Arms Company. However, I don't see the "Echoes of Guns of Autumn" as a make-good of "Guns of Autumn" in any sense of the word--for several reasons.

First of all, the initial show was an hour and a half, the second one was just an hour. And in the second one, the anti-hunting groups were given thirty minutes of that particular time. And none of the people who were, or who partook in the first show were given an opportunity to rebut anything in the second show. So how anyone could judge that as make-good is beyond me. We certainly don't judge it that way.

That's not the point of our suit anyway. We're not seeking equal time in the suit. We're seeking damages.

THUMA: Now, getting back to my initial question of objectivity. Obviously every journalist who produces a program tends to make judgments that he feels are basically sound for different reasons. I suppose if I shot that "Guns of Autumn" program, there might be some changes in judgment that I might choose to make, as opposed to the ones Mr. Drasnin made. Allowing for individual differences, why would you want to sue CBS exactly? You've said that you don't feel that the film is objective

but, specifically, how does it slander a group of people?

WASHINGTON: Well, let's begin by first of all stating that had CBS really wanted to be objective, they had the expertise within their own corporate structure, insofar as they own Field and Stream Magazine and that magazine has on its staff many of the best hunting experts in the country today.

The film has done this to thousands upon thousands of hunters across the state and across the nation. It has caused their peer groups to look at them and, frankly, with a jaundiced eye in some instances. We know some of the people that have been in the film that have been maligned and have been verbally mistreated by associates, both social and business. We believe that the film has--and only time will tell perhaps this--but that the film has added fuel to the fire of the anti-hunting movement. We have seen already in the Michigan Legislature and the Senate, in particular, a move to stop all bear hunting with dogs. That was in the Michigan Senate. There have now been a couple of bills introduced to stop some other forms of hunting--or severely restrict them, where dogs are used.

And it just, it helped to add fuel to the fire, as I say, all over. In my own experience, right here in East Detroit, there was a person who stood up and said something in a public meeting I was in a couple of weeks ago, that that film depicted hunters as they actually are, you know, that in that kind of vein. I've had several letters that one woman called us a bunch of sickies, things like that--have occurred--and we are documenting more and more and more of these kinds of instances.

THUNA: Let me ask you a purely Devil's Advocate question for the moment. The various virtues that have been suggested to me about hunting and I'm not a hunter--

WASHINGTON: Mm hm.

THUMA: --so I can't really identify with them--it seemed to me could be equally carried off well by going out into the field not with a gun but with a camera.

WASHINGTON: Well, there's really no comparison in the two. And for several reasons. First of all, as a hunter, I enjoy very much eating the game that I collect. That's an impossibility when one hunts with a camera. And there is the, in order to have hunted, the opportunity to make the kill must exist. And this is a hard thing to explain to a nonhunter. It's just difficult. As I said earlier, hunting is not really a spectator sport. And it's hard to convey to someone who doesn't hunt, what we find in this. There's, as predators, and as predators we are on the top of the food chain. There

is that element that must be there for us to have successfully hunted. I don't mean we have to kill every time. But that opportunity must be present.

THUMA: Well, it's hard to describe in words, though, what--

WASHINGTON: Right.

THUMA: --any individual hunter gets out of it. But is it possible to show it in pictures? Could CBS have taken that rather esoteric idea and showed it to what you would call good...

WASHINGTON: Well, I think they could have, if they would have showed some of the other things that go into successful hunts. They could have showed more of the camaraderie that exists in a hunting camp. They could have showed the enjoyment of a successful hunt over the table, for instance; they could have showed the rigors of a strenuous pursuit; in fact, they made it look easy in almost all of their instances--with one or two exceptions. They could have showed the tremendous investment in both time and money and conditioning that some hunters put in to the pursuit of their sport. They could have got involved in some of the other things, which a hunter enjoys and does while he's on a hunt.

You know, hunters enjoy all the other forms of nonconsumptive wildlife, equally as much, or more than most persons do. A hunter who's really a hunter and enjoying his hunt learns to read the woods and the fields and so forth and the things that he observes there are of great interest to him and add immensely to the hunting experience. And all of these things go in and they're culminated to the hunter in the kill--very frankly; you know, that's really the end result of a great many steps that, procedures that take place.

THUMA: Turning specifically to Mr. Hoover's comments earlier in the broadcast, I noticed you were writing some things down. What other objections did you note, in what he said?

WASHINGTON: Well, he said, or you asked the question, that CBS, did he feel that CBS had subscribed to the canons of good journalism and his answer to you was 'yes'. And I think that that is one of the real problems that we have had in dealing with this show. We believe that CBS has deliberately deceived, at least us, and we have other people telling us that they deceived them, in order to get assistance of persons to produce a film, which ultimately would be used against them or against their ideology.

THUMA: Can you give me any specific examples?

WASHINGTON: Well, Mr. Drasnin told me flat out that the film would not be used in an anti-hunting way, that the film would depict hunting as it exists in America today. It did not do that. We expressed great concern, both on the telephone and in person, personal confrontations with Mr. Drasnin. Our concern that the film would be used by the anti-hunting fraternity, that it would have an anti-hunting overture. We mentioned the names of personages who are related to or associated with the anti-hunting movement and we were assured at all times that we had nothing to fear, that this was not the intent of CBS, but in the final analysis, it definitely was their intent.

THUMA: What other objections did you find?

WASHINGTON: To the film?

THUMA: Well, no, in specifically Mr. Hoover's comments.

WASHINGTON: Well, he said that he was very proud of it, that they were very proud of it and that they, that CBS felt that the film was fair and I just don't know how he can make that statement. I guess I can appreciate that he would be proud of it because he works for CBS. I, as a journalist, if he is a journalist, I don't understand how he could make that kind of a statement.

THUMA: You mentioned also Cleveland Amory's participation in the program. And you seem to feel as though that was kind of set up.

WASHINGTON: Well, Mr. Amory himself has said that. Mr. Amory has stated that he was hired as a consultant. He stated that he was paid a sum of money. He also stated that he was, that his book was used as the basis for the film. Doris Dixon who's the fund representative, Fund For Animals representative, which Mr. Amory heads here in Michigan was with the crew at Copper(?) Harbor--which is another thing that they kept from us. When we met with them in Eskinaba(?) and we asked them where they'd come from and what they'd been doing, they stated that they had been up in Minnesota doing some work on, I believe, it was an AEC problem, with carrying radioactive materials on commercial carriers. At any time, had they mentioned that Mr. Amory was involved, Fund For Animals involved, Doris Dixon was involved, that they'd been in Copper Harbor on a bear hunt in a garbage dump, they would have lost our support immediately. We would just not have supported them. That would have been an immediate indication as to what their true intentions were.

THUMA: Wouldn't it, in effect(?), have benefitted you

In that instance to check into the program and continue your support, just to make sure your point of view would have been advocated?

WASHINGTON: Well, they took a great deal of footage of our point of view. They used my voice--well, they interviewed me for fifteen minutes at least, it seemed like it was that; and I asked them what I could say and they just gave me a green light. I said everything I ever wanted to say about hunting. They used a couple of things I said out of context, completely out of context. Mr. Drasnin has stated in "Echoes of the Guns of Autumn" that nothing was altered. That's a lie. My own voice was used out of context. Now, if that's not altering film or sound track, I don't know what is.

THUMA: So basically, you don't agree with the judgment that mirrors, in this case, didn't slander anybody; it did slander the Michigan hunter...

WASHINGTON: It slandered one million Michigan hunters at least and I guess only time will tell if others join in this action.

THUMA: Which is now moving into federal court.

WASHINGTON: It has now moved to federal court. Yes. That's correct.

THUMA: Mr. Washington, thank you very much.

Speaking for the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Thomas L. Washington, Executive Director.

We have, in this past half hour of The Urban Report discussed the CBS suit on the program "The Guns of Autumn" which has been lodged in federal court now by the Michigan Conservation Clubs, an issue in the media, that we shall continue to examine on further editions of the program.

For The Urban Report in Oakland Community College, I'm Eric Thuma.

ANNOUNCER: From Oakland Community College this has been The Urban Report.

(MUSIC)

ANNOUNCER: A review of news and public affairs, of ideas, the creative arts and the human condition from the vantage point of those who live, work, and govern in the urban region.

The Urban Report has been a public affairs presentation of Oakland Community College and this station.